Anastasius I Dicorus

(11 April 491 – 9 July 518)

BRIEFING

Anastasius I Dicorus (Ancient Greek: Ἀναστάσιος, romanized: *Anastásios*; c. 431 – 9 July 518) was Roman emperor from 491 to 518. A career civil servant, he came to the throne at the age of 61 after being chosen by Ariadne, the wife of his predecessor, Zeno. His reign was characterized by reforms and improvements in the empire's government, finances, economy and bureaucracy.[3] The resulting stable government, reinvigorated monetary economy and sizeable budget surplus allowed the empire to pursue more ambitious policies under his successors, most notably Justinian I. Since many of Anastasius' reforms proved long-lasting, his influence over the empire endured for centuries.

Anastasius was a Miaphysite Christian and his personal religious tendencies caused tensions throughout his reign in the empire that was becoming increasingly divided along religious lines.

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY

Anastasius was born at Dyrrachium; the date is unknown, but is thought to have been no later than 431. He was born into an Illyro-Roman family. Anastasius had one black eye and one blue eye (heterochromia), and for that reason he was nicknamed *Dicorus* (Ancient Greek: Δίκορος, romanized: *Díkoros*, "two-pupiled"). Before becoming emperor, Anastasius was a silentiary.

Anastasius is known to have had a brother named Paulus, who served as consul in 496. With a woman known as Magna, Paulus was father to Irene, who married Olybrius. This Olybrius was the son of Anicia Juliana and Areobindus Dagalaifus Areobindus. The daughter of Olybrius and Irene was named Proba. She married Probus and was mother to a younger Juliana. This younger Juliana married another Anastasius, maternal grandson of Theodora, and was mother of Areobindus, Placidia, and a younger Proba, who married Flavius Anastasius, born in 530, and mothered Areobindus, born in 550, and Placidia, born in 552 and wife of John Mystacon. Another nephew of Anastasius was Flavius Probus, consul in 502. Anastasius' sister, Caesaria, married Secundinus, and gave birth to Hypatius and Pompeius. Flavius Anastasius Paulus Probus Moschianus Probus Magnus, consul in 518, was a great-nephew of Anastasius. His daughter Juliana later married Marcellus, a brother of Justin II. The extensive family may well have included several viable candidates for the throne.

ACCCESSION

In the weeks following the death of Zeno (491), crowds gathered in the Hippodrome of Constantinople and demanded a Chalcedonian and properly Roman successor, chanting "Give the Empire an Orthodox emperor! Give the Empire a Roman Emperor!" Under such pressure, Ariadne, Zeno's widow, turned to Anastasius. Anastasius was in his sixties at the time of his ascension to the throne. Ariadne chose Anastasius over Zeno's brother Longinus, which upset the Isaurians. Once he took office, Anastasius exiled Longinus and purged a number of Isaurians officials from government. Religiously, Anastasius' sympathies were with the Monophysites. Consequently, as a condition of his accession, the patriarch of Constantinople required that he pledge not to repudiate the Council of Chalcedon.

Ariadne married Anastasius on 20 May 491, shortly after his accession on 11 April. He gained popular favour by a judicious remission of taxation, in particular by abolishing the hated tax on receipts, which was mostly paid by the poor. He displayed great vigour and energy in administering the affairs of the empire. His reforms improved the empire's tax base and pulled it from financial depression and bleak morale. By the end of his reign, it is claimed that the treasury had 320,000 lb gold reserve.

Not long after his accession, the circus factions caused riots and set fires around the Hippodrome. Though its exact cause is unclear, the riot was pacified when Anastasius replaced the city prefect Julian with his brother-in-law Secundinus.

FOREIGN POLICY AND WARS

Under Anastasius, the empire engaged in the Isaurian War against Longinus and the Anastasian War against Sassanid Persia.

The Isaurian War (492–497) was instigated by the Isaurian supporters of Longinus, the brother of Zeno, who was passed over for the throne in favour of Anastasius, and local discontents. The banished Isaurian officials, led by the ex-bishop Conon and former governor Lilingis, gathered in Isauria and mounted a revolt. Their defeat by John the Scythian and John the Hunchback in the Battle of Cotyaeum in 492 broke the back of the revolt, but guerrilla warfare continued in the Isaurian Mountains for several years. The resistance hinged upon the Isaurians' retention of the mountain strongholds. Anastasius passed economic legislations in the mid-490s, which suggests that the war did not absorb all of the energy and resources of the government. After five years, the Isaurian resistance was broken. Large numbers of Isaurians were forcibly relocated to Thrace to ensure that they would not revolt again.

During the Anastasian War of 502–505 against the Sassanid Persians, the Sassanids captured the cities of Theodosiopolis and Amida, although the Romans later received Amida in exchange for gold. The Persian provinces also suffered severely, and a peace was concluded in 506. Anastasius afterward built the strong fortress of Daras, which was named Anastasiopolis, to hold the Persians at Nisibis in check. The Balkan provinces were denuded of troops, however, and were devastated by invasions of Slavs and Bulgars. To protect Constantinople and its vicinity against them, Anastasius built the Anastasian Wall, extending from the Propontis to the Black Sea. He converted his birthplace, Dyrrachium, into one of the most fortified cities on the Adriatic with the construction of Durrës Castle.

Once the relationship between the Romans the Ostrogoths was restored, Italy was independently governed by the Ostrogothic ruler Theodoric, but under the conditions agreed with Anastasius, Theodoric could not make laws, mint his own coins nor appoint Goths to the consulship and civil offices. However, he had the right to promulgate edicts, and appoint Romans to the consulship and civil offices and Goths to the military offices. Theodoric forged a relationship with the Visigothic king Alaric II in Gaul. Anastasius became wary of Theodoric's imperial ambition in the West. In the Frankish *rex* Clovis, the emperor found an ally. Partly thanks to the former *magister militum* Gundobad, he teamed up with Clovis to overthrow the Gothic hegemony in the West. In the Franco–Gothic War (507–511), Clovis defeated the Visigoths at the Battle of Vouillé. The threat of an invasion by the Roman army had prevented Theodoric from intervening in the battle on time to support the Visigoths in 507. In early 508, a Roman attack actually took place in the Italian boot. Anastasius had sent an expedition force of 8,000 soldiers for this attack, but the Roman intervention was not aimed at conquest, since it did not seek a confrontation with Theodoric's army and limited itself only to the looting of some cities in the south. The Franks were thus more successful in the war.

ISAURIAN WAR

The Isaurian War was a conflict that lasted from 492 to 497 and that was fought between the army of the Eastern Roman Empire and the rebels of Isauria. At the end of the war, Eastern Emperor Anastasius I regained control of the Isauria region and the leaders of the revolt were killed.

Background

During the reign of Theodosius II (r. 402–450) people from Isauria, a poor and mountainous province in Asia Minor, reached for the first time high office in the Eastern Roman Empire. Emperor Leo I (r. 457–474) deliberately promoted Isaurians to important posts in the civil and military administration to counterbalance the power of the hitherto all-powerful Germanic elements. The Isaurians, however, were despised as semi-barbarians by the people of Constantinople, who in 473 rose in an anti-Isaurian revolt in the Hippodrome and in 475 overthrew the newly crowned Isaurian emperor Zeno (r. 474–475 and 476–491), killing all the Isaurians in the city in the process.

Zeno returned to the throne in 476, however, this time until his death in 491. Under this emperor, his fellow Isaurians prospered, and the opposition to them, although growing, remained latent. In 484, the Isaurian *magister militum* Illus rebelled against Zeno and fled to the East, where he supported the usurpation of Leontius. That, however, ended in 488 with the capture and execution of both rebel leaders.

Conflict

In 491 Emperor Zeno died and was succeeded by the *silentiarius* Anastasius I, chosen by Empress Ariadne. During the brief interregnum, the Constantinopolitan populace had made its views on the succession clear by cries in the Hippodrome demanding a "Roman emperor", thus rejecting the possible succession of Longinus, Zeno's brother. In the same year, anti-Isaurian riots broke out in the Hippodrome, and Anastasius exiled Longinus and several other Isaurians, including general Longinus of Cardala.

In 492 the Isaurians began a revolt, but in the same year their joint forces were defeated by the Roman army, led by generals John the Scythian and John *Gibbo* (John the Hunchback), at Kotyaion in Phrygia (battle of Cotyaeum). Lilingis, a leading figure in the revolt, died after the battle. The Isaurian survivors took refuge in the mountain strongholds of their country and kept waging war.

In 493 the Roman general Diogenianus captured Claudiopolis but was besieged there by the Isaurians, led by the ex-bishop Conon. To his help came John *Gibbo* who forced the passes and, helped by a sortie of Diogenianus', won an overwhelming victory against the Isaurians, in which Conon died.

From 494 to 497 the Isaurians closed themselves in their fortresses in the Isaurian mountains, where they were kept supplied by Longinus of Selinus through the port of Antioch.

In 497 John the Scythian killed Longinus of Cardala and Athenodorus, whose heads were exposed on a spear in Tarsus, thus effectively ending the war. In 498, John Gibbo captured the last enemy leaders, Longinus of Selinus and Indes, and sent them to the Emperor, who paraded them along the main road of Constantinople to the Hippodrome, where they had to perform the *proskynesis* in front of the imperial *kathisma*.

Aftermath

In 495, Emperor Anastasius I told Patriarch Euphemius that he was tired of war. Euphemius reported this to John, the son-in-law of the Isaurian leader Athenodorus, who referred it back to Anastasius. The emperor had come into conflict with Euphemius before ascending to the throne; furthermore, Anastasius, who had Monophysite sympathies, had been forced by Euphemius to sign a declaration of orthodoxy before being crowned. For these reasons he decided to accuse Euphemius of treason for revealing plans to the enemy. In 496, Euphemius was excommunicated and deposed.

After the war Anastasius rewarded his generals with the consulship: John the Scythian held the post in 498 and John Gibbo in 499. Anastasius also ordered the architect Aetherius to build the Chalke Gate to the Great Palace of Constantinople to celebrate the victory, and the poet Christodorus commemorated the war in a now-lost poem in six books, entitled *Isaurica*.

ANASTASIAN WAR

The Anastasian War was fought from 502 to 506 between the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian Empire. It was the first major conflict between the two powers since 440, and would be the prelude to a long series of destructive conflicts between the two empires over the next century.

Prelude

Several factors underlay the termination of the longest period of peace the Eastern Roman and the Sasanian Empire ever enjoyed. The Persian king Kavad I needed money to pay his debts to the Hephthalites who had helped him regain his throne in 498/499. The situation was exacerbated by recent changes in the flow of the Tigris in Lower Mesopotamia, sparking famines and flood. When the Roman emperor Anastasius I refused to provide any help, Kavad tried to gain the money by force.

War

In 502, Kavad quickly captured the unprepared city of Theodosiopolis, perhaps with local support; the city was in any case undefended by troops and weakly fortified. Martyropolis also fell in the same year. Kavad then besieged the fortress-city of Amida through the autumn and winter (502-503) and captured it after a lengthy siege, although the defenders were unsupported by troops. Many people, particularly the population of Amida, were deported to Pars and Khuzestan in Persia, in particular, to the new city of Veh-az-Amid Kavad (Arrajan).

The Byzantine emperor Anastasius I dispatched an army in May 503 against the Sasanians. The army numbered 52,000 men, the largest Roman force in the East since Julian's invasion of Persia, and the largest assembled Roman army throughout the 6th century. The force gathered at Edessa and Samosata. It operated in three divisions under *magister militum per Orientem* Areobindus, *strategos* Patricius, and Hypatius. Hypatius and Patricius attacked Amida, which was held by a 3,000-strong garrison under Glones. Areobindus, together with Romanus and the Arab *phylarch* Asouades (Aswad) (probably a Kinda leader) attacked Nisibis, in which Kavad was residing. Procopius also mentions Celer as a fourth commander. Notable officers associated with this force include *"hyparch"* Apion I (the Egyptian), *comes* Justin (the future emperor), Patriciolus and his son Vitalian (who later revolted against Anastasius), the Colchian Pharesmanes, and the Goths Godidisklus and Bessas.

Initially, Areobindus gained the upper hand in Nisibis, but Kavad's counterattack defeated him, plundered his fort Apadna, and forced him to retreat westward; Hypatius and Patricius attempted to assist him, but it was too late. They failed to join with Areobindus and were decisively defeated between Apadna and Tell Beshme and retreated to Samosata. According to Zacharias, their cavalry suffered heavily during the retreat, falling from the cliffs of mountains. Kavad continued westward to Constantia but failed to capture it, though he received supplies from its inhabitants. In early September, Kavad reached near Edessa. Areobindus rejected Kavad's demand of 10,000 pounds (4,500 kg) of gold in exchange for peace. Sasanians and Lakhmids overran much of Osrhoene but attempts to attack the fortified city failed. Meanwhile, Byzantine forces under Pharesmanes attacked Amida, who killed the Sasanian commander Glones through cunning. This, together with Hunnic incursions, the arrival of Byzantine reinforcements, and Kavad's lack of supplies, all forced him to withdraw to Persia. This further contributed to the reputation of Edessa as being impregnable. Meanwhile, the *dux* of Osrhoene, Timostratus, defeated the Lakhmids, and the Tha'labites (Byzantine Arabs) attacked Lakhmid capital al-Hira.

In the summer of 503, Anastasius sent reinforcements under *magister officiorum* Celer and canceled taxes from Mesopotamia and Osrhoene, while Hypatius and Apion were recalled. Patricius moved to Amida, defeated a force sent against him, and invested the city; Celer joined him later in the spring of 504. While the siege was ongoing, Celer raided Beth Arabaye, while Areobindus raided Arzanene. Sasanian weakness at this point is apparent by defections to the Byzantine side by the renegade Constantine, a certain Arab chief Adid, and the Armenian Mushlek. The Byzantines eventually captured Amida.

In the same year, an armistice was agreed as a result of an invasion of Armenia by the Huns from the Caucasus. Negotiations between the two powers took place, but such was the distrust that in 506 the Romans, suspecting treachery, seized the Persian officials; once released, the Persians preferred to stay in Nisibis. In November 506, a treaty was finally agreed, but little is known of what the terms of the treaty were. Procopius states that peace was agreed for seven years, and it is likely that some payments were made to the Persians. The Persians did not keep Byzantine territory and no annual tribute was paid so it seems the peace treaty was not harsh on the Byzantines.

Aftermath

The Roman generals blamed many of their difficulties in this war on their lack of a major base in the immediate vicinity of the frontier, a role filled for the Persians by Nisibis (which until its secession in 363 had served the same purpose for the Romans), and in 505 Anastasius therefore ordered the building of a great fortified city at Dara. The dilapidated fortifications were also upgraded at Edessa, Batnae and Amida.

Although no further large-scale conflict took place during Anastasius's reign, tensions continued, especially while work continued at Dara. This construction project was to become a key component of the Roman defenses, and also a lasting source of controversy with the Persians, who complained that its construction violated the treaty agreed in 422, by which both empires had agreed not to establish new fortifications in the frontier zone. Anastasius, however, pursued the project, deflecting Kavad's complaints with money. The Persians were in any case unable to stop the work, and the walls were completed by 507/508.

DOMESTIC AND ECCLESIASTICAL POLICIES

Anastasius was a convinced Monophysite, but his ecclesiastical policy was moderate. He endeavoured to maintain the principle of the Henotikon of Zeno and the peace of the church. Yet, in 512, perhaps emboldened after his military success against the Persians, Anastasius deposed the Metropolitan of Chalcedon and replaced him with a Monophysite. That violated his agreement with the Patriarch of Constantinople and precipitated riots in Chalcedon. The following year, the general Vitalian started a rebellion, quickly defeated an imperial army and marched on Constantinople. With the army closing in, Anastasius gave Vitalian the title of Commander of the Army of Thrace and began communicating with the Pope on a potential end to the Acacian schism.[4] Two years later, General Marinus attacked Vitalian and forced him and his troops to the northern part of Thrace. After the conclusion of the conflict, Anastasius had undisputed control of the empire until his death in 518.

Henotikon

The *Henotikon* (/həˈnɒtɪkən/ or /həˈnɒtɪˌkɒn/ in English; Greek ἑνωτικόν *henōtikón* "act of union") was a christological document issued by Byzantine emperor Zeno in 482, in an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the differences between the supporters of the Council of Chalcedon and the council's opponents (Non-Chalcedonian Christians). It was followed by the Acacian schism.

In 451, the Council of Chalcedon settled christological disputes by condemning both Monophysitism, held by Eutyches, and Nestorianism. However, large sections of the Eastern Roman Empire, especially in Egypt, but also in Palestine and Syria, held miaphysite views. In order to restore unity, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius, devised an irenic formula, which Emperor Zeno promulgated without the approval of a synod of bishops. The *Henotikon* endorsed the condemnations of Eutyches and Nestorius made at Chalcedon and explicitly approved the twelve anathemas of Cyril of Alexandria, but avoided any definitive statement on whether Christ had one or two natures, attempting to appease both sides of the dispute.

This act failed to satisfy either side. All sides took offence at the Emperor openly dictating church doctrine, although the Patriarch of Antioch was pressured into subscribing to the *Henotikon*. When Patriarch John I of Alexandria refused, the Emperor had him expelled and instead recognized the Miaphysite Peter Mongos, who accepted the *Henotikon*. However, other miaphysites abandoned Mongos and were thenceforth called *Akephaloi* (headless ones), since they had lost their leader. After two years of prevarication and temporizing by Acacius, Pope Felix III of Rome condemned the act and excommunicated Acacius (484), although this was largely ignored in Constantinople, even after the death of Acacius in 489.

Zeno died in 491. His successor Anastasius I was sympathetic to the monophysites, and accepted the *Henotikon*. However, Anastasius's position was at odds with the predominantly Chalcedonian population of Constantinople, and Vitalian, a Chalcedonian general, attempted to overthrow him in 514. Anastasius then attempted to heal the schism with Pope Hormisdas, but this failed when Anastasius refused to recognize the excommunication of the now deceased Acacius. Vitalian tried to overthrow the emperor a second time, but he was defeated by loyal officers.

The schism caused by the *Henotikon* was officially settled in 519 when Emperor Justin I recognized the excommunication of Acacius and reunited the Chalcedonian churches. However, the then-Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch still embraced miaphysitism, and their churches came to be known in modern times as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Meanwhile, the incident did nothing to mend the growing rift between the churches of Constantinople and Rome, which would lead in later centuries to the East-West Schism.

DEATH AND SUCCESSION

The *Anonymous Valesianus* gives a (most likely fictional) account of Anastasius attempting to predict his successor. Anastasius did not know which of his three nephews would succeed him and so he put a message under one of three couches and had his nephews take seats in the room. He believed that the nephew who sat on the couch with the message would be his heir.

However, two of his nephews sat on the same couch, and the one with the concealed message remained empty. After putting the matter to God in prayer, he determined that the first person to enter his room the next morning would be the next emperor, and that person turned out to be Justin, the commander of the Excubitors (*comes excubitorum*).

Anastasius died childless in Constantinople on 9 July 518. He was 90 and a half years old according to the later chronicles of John Malalas (c. 491–578) and the *Chronicon Paschale* (c. 630). The early 6th-century historian Victor of Tunnuna states that he died at the age of 88, a figure accepted by most modern historians.

He became the last emperor known to be consecrated as divus on his death. Anastasius left the Imperial treasury with 23,000,000 *solidi*, which is 320,000 pounds of gold or 420 long tons (430 t). Justin then became the next emperor.

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW COINAGE

Anastasius showed an interest in administrative efficiency and issues concerning the economy. Whenever it was possible in governmental transactions, he altered the method of payment from goods to hard currency. This practice decreased the potential for embezzlement and the need for transportation and storage of supplies. It also allowed for easier accounting. He also applied this practice to taxes, mandating that taxes be paid with cash rather than with goods. He eliminated the practice of providing soldiers with their arms and uniforms; instead he allotted each soldier a generous sum of money with which to purchase their own. These changes to imperial policy seemed beneficial; taxpayers often paid smaller tax bills than they had before, while government revenue increased. The increase in revenue allowed the emperor to pay soldiers a higher wage, which attracted native Roman soldiers to the military, as opposed to the barbarian and Isaurian mercenaries which some previous emperors had been forced to rely on. Anastasius is often cited for his "prudent management" of the empire's finances.

Amidst these reforms, though, Anastasius continued the practice of selling official positions. He sold so many that he has been accused of having facilitated the creation of a civilian aristocracy. This claim is strengthened by the growth in influence of families that often held high level positions in the government, such as the Apiones from Egypt. This has puzzled historians, given that the emperor seems to have minimised government corruption/inefficiency in other areas. Anastasius I also gave official positions to his close friend General Celer, his brother-in-law, his brother, his nephews, and his grand-nephews.

The complex monetary system of the early Byzantine Empire, which suffered a partial collapse in the mid-5th century, was revived by Anastasius in 498. The new system involved three denominations of gold, the *solidus* and its half (*semissis*) and third (*tremissis*); and five denominations of copper, the *follis* (worth 40 *nummi*) and its fractions down to a *nummus*. It would seem that the new currency quickly became an important part of trade with other regions. A follis coin has been found in the Charjou desert, north of the River Oxus. Four solidi from his reign have been recovered as far from the Roman Empire as China. China might seem an unlikely trading partner, but the Romans and the Chinese were probably able to do business via Central Asian merchants travelling along the Silk Roads. Some Roman trading partners attempted to replicate the coins of Anastasius. The currency created by Anastasius stayed in use and circulated widely for long after his reign.

A 40-*nummi* coin of Anastasius is depicted on the obverse of North Macedonia's 50 denar banknote, issued in 1996.